

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FTS 31089  
STEREO

# DOWN YONDER

## Old-Time String Band Music from Georgia

With GORDON TANNER, SMOKEY JOE MILLER, UNCLE JOHN PATTERSON and Phil Tanner and the Jr. Skillet Lickers

Recorded, Produced, and Annotated by ART ROSENBAUM



M  
1630.18  
T167  
D748  
1982

JOHN PATTERSON WITH GORDON TANNER & JOE MILLER, OCTOBER 13, 1979 PHOTO BY MARGO N. ROSENBAUM

OVERDRAFT BY CNA FINANCIAL

MUSIC LP

# DOWN YONDER

## SIDE A

1. CARROL COUNTY BLUES—Gordon Tanner, fiddle; Joe Miller, guitar; John Patterson, banjo.
2. HAND ME DOWN MY WALKING CANE—Gordon Tanner, fiddle and vocal; Joe Miller, guitar and vocal; John Patterson, banjo.
3. BILLY IN THE LOW GROUND—Gordon Tanner, fiddle; Joe Miller, guitar; John Patterson, banjo.
4. LONESOME HUNGRY HASH HOUSE—Gordon Tanner, fiddle and vocal; Joe Miller, guitar.
5. GOODBYE, LITTLE BONNIE, BLUE EYES—Gordon Tanner, fiddle and vocal; Joe Miller, guitar; John Patterson, banjo.
6. MEDLEY: CUMBERLAND GAP/ GID TANNER'S BUCKIN' MULE/ HEN CACKLE—Gordon Tanner, fiddle and vocal; Joe Miller, guitar; John Patterson, banjo.
7. LISTEN TO THE MOCKING BIRD—Gordon Tanner, fiddle and vocal; Joe Miller, lead guitar; Jr. Skillet Lickers, back-up, with Phil Tanner, rhythm guitar, Randall Mahaffey, banjo, Larry Nash, bass.

## SIDE B

1. HOP LIGHT, LADIES—Gordon Tanner, fiddle; Joe Miller, guitar; John Patterson, banjo.
2. BULLY OF THE TOWN—Gordon Tanner, fiddle and vocal; Joe Miller, guitar; John Patterson, banjo.
3. FOUR NIGHT'S EXPERIENCE—Gordon Tanner, fiddle and vocal; Joe Miller, guitar.
4. ARKANSAS TRAVELER—Gordon Tanner, fiddle and dialogue; Phil Tanner, guitar and dialogue; Art Rosenbaum, banjo; Larry Nash, bass.
5. DOWN YONDER—Gordon Tanner, fiddle; Joe Miller, guitar; John Patterson, banjo.
6. I WISH I'D BOUGHT A HALF A PINT AND STAYED IN THE WAGON YARD—Gordon Tanner, fiddle and vocal; Joe Miller, guitar; John Patterson, banjo.
7. GOIN' DOWN THE ROAD FEELIN' BAD—Gordon Tanner, fiddle and vocal; Joe Miller, guitar; John Patterson, banjo.
8. OUT OF MY BONDAGE—Gordon Tanner, fiddle; Joe Miller, guitar.

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UNCLE JOHN PATTERSON  
and Phil Tanner and the Jr. Skillet Lickers  
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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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"Three Generations: Gordon Tanner, with son, Phil and grandson, Russ." Dacula, 1978.  
Photo, Margo N. Rosenbaum.

Gordon Tanner welcomed his old friend Smokey Joe Miller, and Uncle John Patterson the "Banjo King" from Carrollton, into the "oblong concern of a chicken coop" back behind his home on the outskirts of Dacula, Georgia. He had converted it into a music room and explained, "We run the chickens off, brought some half-stumps in." "I'm a country boy and feel right at home," said Uncle John. Actually the now-famous building is well fitted-out, with a carpeted area at one end for the musicians, old photos and more recent trophies lining the wall, and an assortment of upholstered chairs and two wood stoves provided for the comfort of the folks who gather on Friday evenings to hear Gordon fiddle the pieces he recorded with his father's renowned string band, Gid Tanner and the Skillet Lickers. He is usually joined by his son Phil and the Jr. Skillet Lickers who lean toward more of a bluegrass approach.

Gordon has continued to work on the earlier sound however, and this warm October Saturday in 1979 he had the typical old-time string band, with "one on the fiddle, one on the banjo, and one on the guitar," as Uncle John declared. "This is the first time I played with Gordon Tanner, but I played a thousand times with his dad." John was explaining why he had no trouble falling in with the familiar old numbers. He was in typical form, his bare feet patting out a beat, his bare

fingers picking and strumming his old S.S. Stewart, the banjo muted but not dulled by a towel behind the head. Gordon's fiddle began to wail out, then whispered, then chopped out a breakdown rhythm, and he smiled and cocked his head back in a pose reminiscent of his father's old photographs. Joe Miller's guitar line was well-salted with runs learned first-hand from Riley Puckett, the guitar picker of the original Skillet Lickers. The three men were putting their lifetimes' experience into some of the finest string band music to come out of Georgia in years.

Born in 1916, Gordon Tanner has lived most of his life in Gwinnett County where his father was a chicken farmer, Saturday night fiddler, and frequent participant in the fiddlers' conventions in nearby Atlanta. Gordon remembers the time in 1924 when he heard his parents discussing the offer by Frank Walker of Columbia Records that Gid go up to New York to make recordings; Gid said he would go if he could get a certain "blind boy" to go with him. A few weeks later Gordon was listening to the Tanner-Puckett duo on the "little grindin' Victrola" his father brought back from New York.

Gid Tanner expanded his recording group into the famous Skillet Lickers which included Clayton McMichen, Lowe Stokes, Fate Norris, and others. Gid was a warm and exuberant entertainer

and was much sought-after for live shows. As Gordon tells it, "he'd be full-time (in music) till things got shallow, then he'd bounce back on the farm. He always kept two mules at home, and a milk cow, and raisin' two hogs a year, but he never hesitated to unhitch the mules and get his fiddle and go, whenever there was a request for him."

It was difficult to assemble the Skillet Lickers for live performances, and Gid Tanner often recruited other musician friends and members of his family for shows close to home. Of Gid's children Gordon was "strongest with the musical talent", and Gid fitted out his shy little red-headed son with thimbles to play rhythm on a washboard; Gordon would also be asked to sing songs like "It Ain't Gonna Rain No More," and "Letter Edged in Black," dance a buck and wing, and play straight man to his dad's jokes. Gordon remembers going to Atlanta with his father on a wagon, and seeing Gid attract a huge crowd in front of some merchant friend's store with his fiddle, only to be moved on by the police. As Gordon told it, "the law has to come in, the streetcar is blocked--and made him put his fiddle up. Of course, me, small as I was, it scared me. Of course, it didn't scare my daddy... He'd scramble around and put his fiddle up, we'd walk around the corner, do the same thing, and I was scared to death the law was coming again... But that's the way it was. They was hungry for that kind of music."

Gordon recalls other occasions when he had to provide an impromptu "second" on his dad's banjo when Gid had to play at a courthouse square or similar setting. "He'd give me the banjo, and had a clamp on it...by the thumb string, and right below there were two fingers, and that was G chord, and he said, 'Hold that right there!' He knew I could beat time on anything. I would play that, you know... He didn't have time to be teaching me. Had to get goin'! 'Course, a lot of his songs, you had to be quick to get in another chord anyway! So... I learned that I wasn't wigglin' my fingers up and down there too much, and somebody might find out I wasn't playin'! So I begin to feel bad about that, and then the fiddle created a lot of interest, and I wound up bein' a fiddler."

Gordon's first modest goal on the fiddle was to play a recognizable tune. At 14 he was playing "Georgia Wagoner" with his father and Riley over the radio in Covington, Kentucky. During his high school years Gordon played in occasional contests and joined his dad playing for Gene Talmadge's 1932 gubernatorial campaign. His fiddle playing progressed quickly; though Gid was still his chief influence, he learned much from the Skillet Lickers' lead fiddlers, Clayton McMichen and Lowe Stokes, both through occasional personal contact and through the records which were at the Tanner house.

In 1934 Stokes and McMichen had left the band, and Gid was asked by R.C.A. to reassemble the Skillet Lickers to cut some sides in San Antonio, Texas. Riley went along, and Ted Hawkins was added on mandolin. Gordon, a 17-year old student in Dacula High, was told by his dad, "'You gonna be out of school for a week--talk to your teacher.'" Gordon presumed that he was being asked along to help drive, as Riley was blind, and Hawkins, as old as Gid didn't drive. Gordon recalls the trip vividly:

"We didn't drive at night, so it took us three days. We'd get up early and drive as long as daylight'd last, then (we'd) lodge in a boardin' house or tavern. We'd have to take whatever we could... One place we stopped, the sidewalks were made of boards, like a Western town... We was drivin' an old '30 Chevrolet. It was already four years old, and my daddy had done a lot of travelin', and it was wore out, the front end was out of line, and I'd be give out in four hours, and he'd take over... Every long hill, he'd say, 'Son, cut the motor off, save all the gas you can.' ...We went into this San Antonio Hotel, the oldest hotel in San Antonio, and this here recording set-up was in, looked to me like it was big enough for a basketball court. And no furnishing in it... and we was out almost in the middle of it, settin' around one mike. We didn't rehearse, and so this man got us spaced around it... 'Course I was at the mike, my daddy in back, and Riley on the left, Ted on the right. So he begin to name out things he wanted us to play."

When asked if he really didn't know he would be playing until the session, he replied, "Well, I sensed that I might be privileged to play one or two numbers... but I did play lead fiddle on everything that was played." Among the twenty-four sides cut in that historic session, the Skillet Lickers' last, were some of their most popular numbers, "Back Up and Push", "Soldier's Joy", "Tanner's Hornpipe", and of course, "Down Yonder." Gordon's name was not on the labels, though his picture appeared in an R.C.A. publicity booklet. For years, he respectfully deferred to the assumption of many that his dad was playing lead fiddle. Though Gid never did claim to have played "Down Yonder", Gordon remembers that he "coached my daddy in learnin' to play it after I saw that it was selling. I said, 'People's gonna ask you to play it wherever you go.' But I never could get him to get the double stops. He would 'single-out' strings. And people would say, 'Nobody plays "Down Yonder" like your daddy!' I said, 'That's right.' I never did have no reason to try to steal the credit, because I was lucky to be on."

Gordon graduated high school in 1936. Though he was offered a basketball scholarship to North Georgia College, he didn't want to go into debt to buy the uniforms, and stayed at home. He married later that year, and he and his bride, Electra, worked at chopping cotton for 75¢ a day to pay the rent on the house they rented, later bought,

and still live in. Gordon also sharecropped with his father, drove a school bus, and later went to work for General Shoe Company in the county seat of Lawrenceville. Even at \$9.45 a week such jobs were hard to find in the midst of the Depression, and Gordon was reluctant to leave for the uncertain life of a professional musician, particularly after the couple's first child was born. He worked his way up to being a foreman at General Shoe, and later worked at Georgia Boot in Flowery Branch until his retirement in 1981.

Gordon did continue playing with his father in the area, and at church on Sundays. In 1956 he began to make violins and has mastered this difficult art; he plays one of his fine instruments on this record.

Gid Tanner died in 1960, and in 1968 Gordon and his son Phil organized the Jr. Skillet Lickers to keep the name and the music going. They have played at the Georgia Grassroots Festival in Atlanta and the Georgia Mountain Fair in Hiawassee where Gordon won the "King of the Mountain Fiddlers" crown, just one of his many recent honors. In 1980 Gordon and Phil performed at the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife in Washington.

Norm Cohen has pointed out that Gid Tanner, forty at the time he started to record, was older than Puckett or McMichen, and unlike these musicians who absorbed popular and jazz influences into their music, "his orientation was toward traditional music." ("The Skillet Lickers: A Study of a Hillbilly String Band and Its Repertoire" JAFL, Vol 78, 1965.) Gordon has inherited this love of the older material from his father and knows a good portion of the traditional songs and tunes played by Gid and others in the Skillet Lickers' circle. Like his father, Gordon can sing along with the fiddle, and, though he does not have Gid's gift for extroverted comedy, he is a warm and communicative performer, and has surpassed his father's technical ability on the fiddle. The good response to his music at recent festivals has convinced Gordon that it still can speak to contemporary audiences: "It's genuine, not a fad... something that blooms up and goes away, and you talk about it years ago, that come up like a storm, and went on."

Joe Miller is a long-time friend of the Tanner family and played guitar with Gid Tanner and Riley Puckett in many shows in the forties. He can evoke a vivid contrast between the generous, outgoing, and comical "Mr. Gid" and the introverted and moody Puckett. He was born in Walton County in 1918, and his family wanted to instill an interest in music in him at an early age: his mother made him a gourd fiddle fitted with strings unwound from a sieve, and a cornstalk bow. When Joe was four or five his uncle bought him a 25¢ Marine Band harmonica, and, Joe says, "next time he came to visit, I was playing that thing, and it just thrilled him to death! So that fall he gathered his crop and bought me several

more, different keys. I thought I was really uptown! I'd tote three of them in my pocket. People would give me nickels and dimes to play... I was so little, you know, the curiosity."

It was the guitar which most attracted him, and, as he tells it, his parents "ordered a 'leven-dollar ninety-five cent Bradley Kincaid Hound-Dog guitar, and that was my start. Mother's brothers would come by and tune it up for me, and sing a few songs, show us a few chords... And on those long winter nights we'd parch peanuts and I'd thump on that old guitar."

Joe first heard Riley Puckett play when he was about six or seven, and he took every opportunity to go to Skillet Licker shows. "I was always hanging around the side of the stage... to catch what I could. Riley just took my fancy as a guitar player, and it never changed." Joe adapted Riley's unique way of playing runs with index and middle fingers to the flat pick. His first professional experience was with fiddler Charlie Bowman, playing for the WSG Barn Dance, at the old Erlanger Theater in Atlanta. Having extremely poor eyesight, Joe felt he could make a living as a musician, and in 1939 went up to Chattanooga, Tennessee, to play over WDOD with Chester Anderson and Kentucky Evelyn. He was guaranteed \$5 a week, which "didn't leave much to play on" after spending \$2 for groceries and \$3 for a one-room apartment with a bed, two-burner stove, a little table and chair. After "a few months...my shoes would get to ramblin', I'd get to thinking about things back home...I'd get homesick and was ready to give it up."

In the early forties he went on the road again, this time with Fisher Hendley and the Rhythm Aristocrats out of Columbia, South Carolina. Hendley gave him the nickname "Smokey Joe" for his ability to play lightning-fast runs and note-for-note fiddle tunes.

Back in Georgia Joe worked with Gid Tanner, whom he considers "the most honest, the most congenial man I ever worked with in show business... I played with him up to the time I got married, and some for good old brotherly love after that." His marriage was in 1943, and shortly thereafter he went to work at the Carwood overall plant, a job he held until his retirement in 1981. He got the calling to preach in 1951 and was ordained by the North Georgia Conference of the Congregational Holiness Church. For the last 26 years he has had a radio ministry first out of WIMO, Winder, then WMRE and currently WKUN, both in Monroe.

His wife died in 1981, and Joe lives alone in a big house in the Walton County village of Campton; he gives music lessons in the tiny music store he keeps in the side room. Music is the cement for his friendship with Gordon Tanner, whom he considers dear as a brother. "There's a bond like that between most musicians... It's the best recreation I have. (Some) go to their football games...hoot and holler their head off--just give me my old guitar and two or three of my good friends, brother, I'm in heaven!"

Though he is a religious man and often sings and plays gospel

music, he continues to love the secular folk songs and parlor songs of an earlier day. For him, "it expresses the early pioneer life of people in America, their heartaches and sorrows... Back in those days when a tune came out, it usually had an authentic background... they sang about things that were tragic, and some love songs. But I remember as a young child sitting around the fireside, and hear musicians sing these songs on phonograph and radio, it just seeded in my soul. And at a tender age I could just weep when they'd sing those beautiful songs with that pretty harmony, telling those sad stories. I guess I'm living in a changing age, and it breaks my heart to see those old songs put back on the shelf, and the younger generation doesn't know about it. And I'm persuaded to believe that if it's introduced to them...it would touch their heart. It made a better person out of me. I'm sure of that."

John Patterson died in the Spring of 1980, a few months after these recordings were made. He was a warm and outgoing Southern gentleman of the old school, and a master stylist and technician on the five-string banjo. He will be missed by his many friends and the growing number of people who are coming to appreciate his importance to the story of Southern old-time music.

He learned to pick "Shout Lulu" on his mother's lap when he was 3 years old. If his first tune was typical for Southern banjo pickers, his very early start and subsequent spectacular career certainly were not. Bessie Patterson was a champion banjo player, and when she died in 1924 she had already schooled her 14-year old son in the basics of his extraordinary style, a combination of up-picking with chordal brushes and 3-finger melody playing; on her death bed she had him promise never to let anyone beat him playing a banjo. John got his first chance to defend his mother's title a month later at the Fiddlers' Convention at Atlanta's City Auditorium. He found himself up against Rosa Lee, the daughter of Fiddling John

Carson, later to be known as "Moonshine Kate." The full story of this epic contest has been told by Uncle John in his own words in the notes for his banjo LP (Plains Georgia Rock, Arhoolie 5018), and by Dr. Gene Wiggins in both prose and poetry ("Uncle John Patterson, Banjo King," The Devil's Box, Vol 13, #3). Rosa Lee had already played John's best piece, "Spanish Fandango", so the 67-pound boy, wearing a shirt made out of a flour sack and a pair of his "grand-daddy's pistol pants" picked "Hen Cackle" so spiritedly that "old Gid Tanner, and even John Carson... got to cackling and got to crowing." In the finals John was allowed to play "Spanish Fandango", and won. "And from that time till now I've managed to take care of myself," he said in recent years. He has been National Champion and never lost a contest.

Uncle John--he has worn the "Uncle" since boyhood--had been playing at dances with the famous fiddler Ahaz Gray, like the Patterson's, a resident of Carroll County on Georgia's western edge. He later teamed up with John Carson, as well as many other noted Georgia string musicians, in the 1932 Talmadge campaign; he met Gordon on some occasions when Gid Tanner was along, but Gordon was usually helping with the driving rather than playing.

After Gene's election, John, who had been a sharecropper, became the Governor's bodyguard. John Carson was made elevator operator in the Statehouse, and the two musicians often played together in the Statehouse and at Talmadge parties. Following Talmadge's defeat in the early forties, John went to work at Lockheed Aircraft as a hydraulics engineer. Music was not neglected during the following years: John toured with Smiley Burnett in 1952, and in 1962 he played his banjo composition, "John Glenn Special" in a 5-hour marathon, exceeding his goal to play it as long as the astronaut was in orbit! John had politics as well as music in his blood, and he served from 1968 to 1974 as State Representative from Carrollton.

John was an all-around musician,

adept on the fiddle, piano, and musical saw as well as banjo. After losing his picking index finger in an accident in the fifties he simply shifted the lead to his second finger. Before his Arhoolie record, on which he was backed by his son James on guitar, he recorded little--one disc in 1931 and another in 1947 with his Carroll County Ramblers. In his last years John performed at the Georgia Grass Roots Festival in Atlanta. In addition to his other achievements, Uncle John Patterson will be remembered for his work here with two other veterans of Georgia's great age of old-time music.

Side A, Band 1 CARROLL COUNTY BLUES  
Gordon Tanner, fiddle; Joe Miller, guitar; John Patterson, banjo.

This is Gordon's version on a well-known Southeastern fiddle tune. Gid Tanner played it; Arthur Smith's is probably the best known recorded rendition.

Side A, Band 2 HAND ME DOWN MY WALKING CANE Gordon Tanner, fiddle and lead vocal; Joe Miller, guitar and tenor vocal; John Patterson, banjo.

The original Skillet Lickers recorded this popular 19th century comic song and parody of camp-meeting pieces. Gid would use his "double-barrelled", or falsetto, voice on the "all my sins" line.

- 1) Oh hand me down my walkin' cane,  
Hand me down my walkin' cane,  
Hand me down my walkin' cane,  
I'm gonna leave on the midnight train,  
All my sins been taken away, taken  
away.
- 2) Yonder comes a man across the field,  
Yonder comes a man across the field,  
Yonder comes a man across the field  
Kickin' up dust like an automobile,  
All my sins been taken away, taken  
away.
- 3) Mary wept, and Martha moaned,  
Mary wept, and Martha moaned,  
Mary wept and Martha moaned,  
Susie got choked on a chicken bone,  
All my sins been taken away, taken  
away.
- 4) Now if I die in Tennessee,  
If I die in Tennessee,  
If I die in Tennessee,  
send me back by C.O.D.  
All my sins been taken away, taken  
away.

Side A, Band 3 BILLY IN THE LOW GROUND  
Gordon Tanner, fiddle; Joe Miller, guitar, John Patterson, banjo.

This is one of the older American fiddle tunes. Gordon's playing derives from the version Lowe Stokes recorded with Riley Puckett. As in most of the up-tempo tunes here, Gordon lets his fiddle drop back from time to time to let Uncle John's banjo carry the lead, a practice infrequently heard on early string band records where the 5-string banjo was used either for back-up or doubled the melody with the fiddle.



Joe Miller and Gordon Tanner, Campton, Ga., Photo, Margo N. Rosenbaum

Side A, Band 4 LONESOME HUNGRY  
HASH HOUSE Gordon Tanner, fiddle and  
vocal; Joe Miller, guitar.

A Skillet Licker piece, another version  
of this was recorded by Charlie Poole's  
North Carolina Ramblers.

1) There's a place down the street  
where the tramps and hoboes meet:  
A place they call that "second-class  
hotel.

Oh the bill of fare was read, two  
new boarders, they fell dead,  
In that lonesome hungry hash house  
where I stay.

Chor:

Oh, the biscuits they were  
wooden, they had sawdust in  
the puddin',  
The baby had both hands in the  
soup;  
Oh, the eggs they were matched,  
If you touched them they would  
hatch,  
In that lonesome hungry hash  
house where I stay.

Chor:

Oh, the butter it was bald,  
if you touch it it would squall,  
The hound-dogs would lick out  
your plate;  
And the sausage rolled on wheels,  
if you touch 'em, it would  
squeal,  
In that lonesome hungry hash  
house where I stay.

Side A, Band 5 GOODBYE, LITTLE  
BONNIE, BLUE EYES Gordon Tanner,  
fiddle and vocal; Joe Miller, guitar;  
John Patterson, banjo.

This is a traditional Southern folk song,  
known in the Carolinas and Georgia. It  
shares its tune with "There's More Pret-  
ty Girls Than One", and a verse from  
that song crops in Gordon's version,  
which he remembers singing "when my  
daddy begin to put me in front of the  
public, I guess when I was around five  
years old, or six." He learned it from  
Nora Day, an aunt on his mother's side.  
"They were around the organ a good bit,  
and they sang... She had two brothers,  
and they played the banjo some, that's  
just home, around the fireplace, and I  
believe she wrote down and had me to  
learn that song."

1) Goodbye, little Bonnie, blue eyes,  
Goodbye, little Bonnie, blue eyes,  
I'm going out West where I can do  
best,  
Goodbye, little Bonnie, blue eyes.

2) The train is rollin' around,  
The train is rollin' uptown;  
The train is rollin' to carry me  
away,  
Goodbye, little Bonnie, blue eyes.

3) My trunk is done packed and gone,  
My trunk is done packed and gone,  
My trunk is packed to never come  
back,  
Goodbye, little Bonnie, blue eyes.

4) You promised to marry me,  
You promised to marry me,  
You promised that you would marry me,  
Down under that coconut tree.

- 5) I asked your father for you,  
I asked your mother, too;  
I asked them once, I asked them twice,  
I asked them good and nice.
- 6) Now there's more pretty girls than  
one,  
There's more pretty girls than one;  
There's more than one, there's more  
than two,  
But none in this world like you.
- 7) The train's done come and gone,  
The train's done come and gone,  
It's gone, gone, to never come back,  
Goodbye, little Bonnie, goodbye.
- 8) Goodbye, little Bonnie, blue eyes,  
Goodbye, little Bonnie, blue eyes,  
Goodbye, little Bonnie, don't cry,  
if you do,  
You'll spoil your beautiful eyes.

Side A, Band 6 MEDLEY: CUMBERLAND  
GAP/ GID TANNER'S BUCKIN' MULE/ HEN  
CACKLE Gordon Tanner, fiddle and  
vocal; Joe Miller, guitar; John  
Patterson, banjo.

Gordon learned this medley from his  
father, who would play them together  
in contests, not telling the judges  
that they were not variations on a  
single tune. The alert listener will  
hear that Gordon is continuing Gid's  
joke by sandwiching a "sketch" of  
"Katy Hill" between the first two an-  
nounced pieces. Gordon recalls, "My  
daddy...always...got a big audience  
response to "Old Hen Cackle." He  
would mock the hen, and he'd cackle  
himself, make the fiddle cackle, and  
then the rooster, and then he'd say,  
"Rhode Island red!"

Gordon (spoken): Uncle John? Joe?  
I'm thinkin' about an old tune, or  
maybe it's a medley of tunes,  
"Cumberland Gap", and "My Daddy's  
Buckin' Mule--Gid Tanner's Buckin'  
Mule", and then, "Hen Cackle." Do  
you think we could get away with  
that?

Answer: I believe we could.  
Gordon: Well let me see, now, that's  
in G, ain't it?

Sung:  
Me and my wife's pap  
Walked all the way to the  
Cumberland Gap.

Me and my wife and my wife's dog  
Crossed the creek on a hickory log.

-----  
Hard to ride, the roads is muddy,  
Hard to ride, can't get the saddle  
on. -----

Old hen she cackled, she cackled in  
the lot,  
Next time she cackled, she cackled  
in the pot.

Side A, Band 7 LISTEN TO THE MOCKING  
BIRD Gordon Tanner, fiddle and vocal;  
Joe Miller, lead guitar; Jr. Skillet Licker  
Phil Tanner, rhythm guitar; Randall MaHaff  
banjo; Larry Nash, bass.

This piece was first published in Philadel-  
phia in 1855 by Septimus Winner, who wrote  
the verses under the pseudonym "Alice Haw-  
thorne". He credited the music to Richard  
Milburn, or "Whistling Dick", a black boy  
he heard playing the guitar on the streets  
of Philadelphia, and whistling and making  
lilting bird imitations. Gordon says,  
"It rings in everybody's ear, but my  
system is different... The first impres-  
sion I ever got from the violin was Curley  
Fox playin' it. He was in a contest,  
him and an Indian. They locked up on  
first place. One played 'Mockin' Bird',  
the other'd play 'Mockin' Bird.' That  
was in '27, or '29." That could not  
happen nowadays, as the tune is barred  
in most contests, to Gordon's vexation,  
as "trick fiddling." Gordon learned  
the words from Edith, the wife of his  
brother G.W. Tanner. "She used to sing  
it on stage, and I would back her up--  
she would be singin' 'Listen to the mock-  
ing bird' and I would be imitatatin' the  
mocking bird, and that was one of acts  
we did from the stage."

1) I'm dreaming now of Hallie,  
sweet Hallie, sweet Hallie,  
I'm dreaming now of Hallie,  
And the mocking bird's singing all  
day.

She's sleeping in the valley,  
the valley, the valley,  
She's sleeping in the valley,  
And the mocking bird's singing  
over her grave.

Chor:  
Listen to the mocking bird,  
Listen to the mocking bird,  
The mocking bird's singing all day.

Listen to the mocking bird,  
Listen to the mocking bird,  
The mocking bird's singing  
over her grave.

Side B, Band 1 HOP LIGHT, LADIES,  
Gordon Tanner, fiddle; Joe Miller,  
guitar; John Patterson, banjo.

Gordon recorded this with the Skil-  
let Lickers; it is an American ver-  
sion of the well-known Irish fiddle  
tune, "Miss McCloud's Reel."

Side B, Band 2 BULLY OF THE TOWN  
(Laws I 14) Gordon Tanner, fiddle  
and vocal; Joe Miller, guitar; John  
Patterson, banjo.

First recorded by Riley Puckett in  
1926, this song was originally pub-  
lished in 1896 by Charles Trevathan,  
who heard it in Babe Connor's Place  
in St. Louis. Like "Listen to the  
Mocking Bird" this is another example  
of a song learned from oral tradition,  
published as sheet music, then becoming  
part of the repertoire of early folk-  
professional performers, and finally  
re-entering folk tradition. Gordon  
says that his dad did not perform this  
much, as he had trouble playing the  
"harmonial strings" (double stops).  
"But Arthur Hugh (Tanner, Gid's broth-  
er) or Riley, in whatever recording  
was being done, one of them would do

1) I'm looking for the bully, the  
bully of the town,  
I'm looking for the bully, the  
bully can't be found,  
I'm looking for the bully of the  
town.  
Chor:

When I walk this levee 'round  
and 'round,  
Every day I may be found;  
When I walk this levee 'round  
and 'round,  
I'm looking for that bully  
of the town.

2) I'm going down the street with a  
gun in my hand,  
I'm looking for that bully, I'll  
shoot him if I can.  
I'm looking for that bully of  
the town.  
Chor:

Side B, Band 3 FOUR NIGHTS' EXPERI-  
ENCE (Child, No. 274) Gordon Tanner,  
fiddle and vocal; Joe Miller, guitar.

This is, of course, "Our Goodman", a  
comic British ballad that has entered  
the American tradition and was recorded  
by several early hillbilly artists and  
groups, including the Skillet Lickers.  
Gordon heard it performed by his father,  
who used his falsetto voice for the  
woman's part, and by his uncle, Arthur  
Hugh Tanner. Gordon does not "know how  
it rebounded into my family."

1) The first night when I got home,  
drunk as I could be,  
I found a hoss in the stable where  
my hoss ought to be.

"Now come, my wife, my dear little  
wife, explain this thing to me.  
How come a hoss in the stable where  
my hoss ought to be?"

"Oh you blind fool, you blind fool,  
can't you never see?  
It's nothing but a milk-cow your  
granny sent to me."

"I rambled this wide world over,  
ten thousand miles and more;  
Saddle on a milk-cow's back, I  
never have seen before."

2) Second night when I got home,  
drunk as I could be,  
I found a coat on the rack where  
my coat ought to be.

"Oh come, my wife, my dear little  
wife, explain this thing to me.  
How come a coat on the rack where  
my coat ought to be?"

"You blind fool, you blind fool,  
can't you never see?  
It's nothin' but a bed-quilt  
your granny sent to me."

"I rambled this wide world over,  
ten thousand miles and more;  
Pockets in a bed-quilt, I never  
have seen before."

3) Third night when I got home,  
drunk as I could be,  
I found a head on the pillow  
where my head ought to be.

"Now come, my wife, my dear little  
wife, explain this thing to me:  
How come a head on the pillow  
where my head ought to be?"

"Oh you blind fool, you blind  
fool, can't you never see?  
It's nothin' but a cabbage-head  
your granny sent to me."

"I traveled this wide world over,  
ten thousand miles and more;  
Moustache on a cabbage-head  
I never have seen before!"

Farmer: Oh, it don't fork, it just goes  
on top of the hill and splits all to  
pieces.

Traveler: Well I'm lost and I'd like  
to spend the night.

Farmer: Well you can't stay here.

Traveler: Listen, I'm a long ways  
from home, I'd like to spend the  
night anyhow.

Farmer: Well, knock a dog there off  
a bench and have a seat!

Traveler: Hey, that corn out there  
looks mighty yellow.



General Shoe Company Employees square  
dance, Lawrenceville, Ga., 1943. Left  
to right: Roger Furlong, Gid Tanner,  
Gerald Bailey, Gordon Tanner, John

Stanley, E.J. Stanley, G.W. Tanner,  
and his son, Tony Tanner. Photo:  
Herman Fowler, courtesy of Gordon  
Tanner.

Side B, Band 4 ARKANSAS TRAVELER  
Gordon Tanner, fiddle and dialogue;  
Phil Tanner, guitar and dialogue;  
Art Rosenbaum, banjo; Larry Nash,  
bass.

This bit of American folk theater was  
first published by Oliver Ditson & Co.  
of Boston in 1863 and attributed to Mose  
Case, an itinerant musician, though the  
fiddle tune was in print by 1847 and  
both the tune and the skit were likely  
in oral circulation. The sheet music  
had an accompanying explanation: "This  
piece is intended to represent an Eastern  
man's experience among the inhabitants  
of Arkansas, showing their hospitality  
and the mode of obtaining it." Country  
entertainers have relished the story  
of the farmer getting the best of a  
city slicker, and the Skillet Lickers  
were no exception. According to Gor-  
don, "Arkansas Traveler" is a deal that  
always opened my eyes. I'd hear my daddy  
and uncle (Arthur Hugh Tanner) play  
that from the stage, and setting around  
the house... It would tear the audience  
up... So when Phil was growin' up and  
settin' under our feet and all, he'd  
hear me and Papa Tanner do it. We'd  
do it from the stage. Well, first thing  
I know, well Phil--I was playin' it,  
and I said, 'Son, I'm gonna ask you a  
few questions.' He answered every one!  
Done knowed it." Today it is a mainstay  
of Jr. Skillet Lickers shows.

Traveler (Gordon): Hey, stranger, where  
this road go?

Farmer (Phil): Well, I been livin' here  
all my life, and it went anywhere yet.  
I don't know it.

Traveler: I mean, where does it fork  
at?

Farmer: Oh, yeah, we planted the yellow  
kind.

Traveler: What I mean, it don't look  
like you gonna make but a half a  
crop.

Farmer: Oh yeah, that's right, we  
just workin' on halves.

Traveler: Well, how'd your 'taters  
turn out?

Farmer: Oh, they didn't turn out,  
me and Betty had to dig 'em out!

Traveler: Woah, look out! Head that

cow!

Farmer: Oh she's already headed, thank  
you.

Traveler: Well turn her, then!

Farmer: She's already turned, hairy  
side out.

Traveler: Well, speak to her, you fool!

Farmer: Good mornin, cow.

Traveler: Squirrels very thick in this  
country?

Farmer: Oh yeah, they're just about  
as thick as my wrist.

Traveler: Hey, you have mighty dry  
eatin' around here.

Farmer: There's a bucket of water over  
there. Wet it!

Traveler: Well, do you have knives and  
forks, silverware, and stuff, you  
know, to eat with?

Farmer: No, we don't.

Traveler: Well, how do you do, then?

Farmer: Very well, thank you, and  
how are you?

Traveler: How long you been livin'  
here anyhow?

Farmer: You see that mountain over  
yonder?

Traveler: Yeh.

Farmer: That was just a hole in the  
ground when I first moved here.

Traveler: That creek down there very

Farmer: There's water slim to the bottom.  
Traveler: I mean, can anything cross it?  
Farmer: Yeah, my old geese, they cross it every day.

Traveler: Hey, as I said, I've traveled about a good bit, and 'course, I'm lost, but I don't seem to find much between you and a fool!  
Farmer: 'Bout the only thing I see is that fiddle there!

Side B, Band 5 DOWN YONDER Gordon Tanner, fiddle; Joe Miller, guitar; John Patterson, banjo.

The enormous popularity that this tune enjoys springs from the 1934 Skillet Lickers recording, with Gordon fiddling (see comments above on this session); it was the first full-length recording and became the group's best-selling record, eventually selling over a million. R.C.A. has never discontinued it. Gordon remembers how he came to learn it: "...I was enthused over learning to play fiddle, and my surroundings was, of course, my daddy, and other musicians, and what records might be brought in. Now as I learned to play, I would spin a record occasionally, whatever was around the house--but this record, if I recall, it was a dialogue record--it was Skillet Lickers' 'Corn Liquor Still in Georgia', or it could have been on the 'Bee Hunt', or the dialogue 'Possum Hunt on Stump House Mountain.' Well they would talk a while, then they would play. Anyway, McMichen played 'Down Yonder', or Lowe Stokes, one. Well that little sketch, I learned, it wasn't labeled. The reason I knew it was 'Down Yonder', well I learned it, and any time I was around other musicians... I would play it." In a story that Gordon had not heard, Uncle John told how the tune had been titled. It seems that John was with Gid Tanner, Lowe Stokes, Fate Norris, and some others at the Fiddlers' Convention in Atlanta in the twenties. "I was there with the banjo, and I was very small. I just wanted to be around, play with 'em. They's say, 'Come on in, Uncle John.' I'd be sort of timid, and set down, and you talk about banjo, fiddle, and guitar, we'd tear it apart! So I broke a string. They'd been workin' on this tune for a long time, and nobody knew what they was playin.'

And I broke a string, and I says, 'I got to go down yonder and get a string.' And they said, 'That's it, "Down Yonder"!' And I went down on Decatur Street and got a string to go on the banjo." "That's history," Gordon commented.

Side B, Band 6 I WISH I'D BOUGHT A HALF A PINT AND STAYED IN THE WAGON YARD Gordon Tanner, fiddle and vocal; Joe Miller, guitar; John Patterson, banjo.

If "Arkansas Traveler" tells of a city slicker's adventures in the country, this song recounts a country boy's adventures in town. The town was evidently Atlanta. Joe Miller explained that the hero "had made his little crop, went to get it ginned, get it cashed in, but he... wanted to celebrate a little, but he got in trouble." Today Atlanta is a metropolis of skyscrapers and expressways whose suburban sprawl is transforming nearby Gwinnett County (Gordon's home in the eastern edge of



"Jr. Skillet Lickers, 1977" Photo, Margo N. Rosenbaum

the county is still quiet and rural). A half century ago, the electric lights and cars of the city were enough to tempt a young sharecropper in this song recorded, and probably composed, by Arthur Hugh Tanner, Gid Tanner's youngest brother. Like his brother, Arthur Tanner was only a part-time musician, being a house painter by trade.

1) Now I'm a jolly farmer, last night I come to town;  
I brought a bale of cotton, I'd worked the whole year 'round.  
I put my mule in the wagon yard,  
I bought a bottle of gin.  
I went out to see the 'lectric lights and watch the cars come in.

2) I met a dude out on the street, the clock was striking nine;  
He said, "Come on, you hayseed, take a drink, it's mine."  
I must have bought a dozen drinks,  
it hit by pocketbook hard.  
I wish I's bought a half a pint and stayed in the wagon yard.

3) Now I'm a deacon in a hard-shell church, down near Possum Trot.  
If the sisters hears about this spree, it's bound to make them hot!  
I went out on a party, I led the pace that kills;  
When I woke up the gang was gone and left me all the bills.

4) I found them over on the corner, nest Salvation Hall;  
That drunken bunch was over there singing, "Jesus Paid it All."  
They put me out in a dry goods box, and Lord, my pillow was hard.  
I wish I'd have bought me a half a pint and stayed in the wagon yard.

5) Now listen to me, farmers, I'm here to talk with sense:  
If you want to see the 'lectric lights, peep through the fence.  
Don't monkey with those city guys, you'll find them slick as lard.  
Just go and buy you half a pint and stay in the wagon yard!

Side B Band 7 GOIN' DOWN THE ROAD FEELIN' BAD Gordon Tanner, fiddle and vocal; Joe Miller, guitar; John Patterson, banjo.

Originating in the black pre-blues tradition, this piece is known by practically all Southern folk musicians, black and white. Woody Guthrie and others made it the theme song of the dust bowl refugees of the thirties, and Bluegrass musicians play it as an instrumental, "Lonesome Road Blues." Gordon, Joe, and John have played it as long as they could remember. The optimistic last verse seems to be local to Georgia.

1) I'm going down this road feelin' bad (three times)  
I ain't gonna be treated such-a-way.

2) They feed me on corn bread and peas (three times)  
I ain't gonna be treated thisaway.

3) I'm going where the weather suits my clothes (three times)  
I ain't gonna be treated thisaway.

4) I'm going where the water tastes like wine (three times)  
I ain't gonna be treated such-a-way.

5) Now I'm goin' down the road feelin' good (three times)  
I wouldn't change a thing if I could.

Side B, Band 8 OUT OF MY BONDAGE Gordon Tanner, fiddle; Joe Miller, guitar.

"Out of my bondage, sorrow and night, Jesus, I come, Jesus, I come."

Composed by W.T. Sleeper and George C. Stebbins, this song was published as "Jesus, I Come" in 1914, and appears under that title in the Baptist Hymnal and Cokesbury Hymnal. Gordon plays it frequently in church. The deep religious faith and warm friendship of Gordon Tanner and Joe Miller are reflected in this beautiful fiddle and guitar setting.

Art Rosenbaum  
Athens, Georgia, January, 1982

For material on the musicians other than the articles cited above, see Gene Wiggins, "Gordon Tanner: Fiddler and Fiddle Maker", The Devil's Box, Vol. 12, #2; and Joel Cordle, "Skillet Lickin' in Georgia--Gordon Tanner", Bluegrass Unlimited, Vol. 13, #9.

The cuts featuring Gordon Tanner, Joe Miller, and John Patterson were recorded in Dacula, Georgia, October 13, 1979. The other cuts were recorded at various sessions in Dacula and Cumpton, Georgia between 1977 and 1981. All recording by Art Rosenbaum.

Jacket photo of Tanner, Miller, and Patterson by Margo N. Rosenbaum.

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